



Teachers' pedagogical and relational identity negotiation in the Finnish CLIL context[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring in-service CLIL teachers' pedagogical and relational identity.
- Examining identity agency in CLIL teacher's professional identity negotiation.
- Importance of personal and professional resources for identity agency.
- The mediating role of foreign language in CLIL teachers' pedagogical identity.
- Importance of relational identity for pedagogical identity.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional identity of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers in Finnish primary education. It aims at explaining how CLIL teachers negotiate their pedagogical and relational identity, and how *identity agency* is exercised in negotiating a more encompassing professional identity. Thematic analysis of thirteen interviews outlines the bi-directional process of identity negotiation between personal and professional resources, and social contexts at work. The results highlight a connection between professional identity and agency, and suggest that identity negotiation is a process of working and sharing with others, but also individually.

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1. Introduction

Despite the long history of education as an institutionalized means of sharing cultural knowledge and international research, contemporary research continues to highlight the considerable flux that takes place within and around education (Weiner & Torres, 2016). In the midst of this flux, however, education continues to

be enacted at a local level in institutional communities divided into classrooms in which teachers and pupils – ideally – enter into a pedagogic contract to teach and learn. It is this relational heart of education that has led to the descriptions of teachers as mediators of the curriculum (Alexander, 2001). At the same time, notions of teaching as a lifelong career are being replaced by temporary trials (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). It is perhaps this recognition of the central role of the teacher at the cutting edge of education and the importance of teachers in the midst of change (Vähäsantanen, 2015) that has focused research on the professional identity of teachers (Day & Gu, 2010; Korhonen & Törmä, 2016; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, & Turunen, 2016; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Whilst some attention has been given to second/foreign language teacher identity with studies addressing language teachers' institutional contexts, teacher education, early years of practice, classroom practice experience, and non-native speaking

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teachers (e.g. Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tsui, 2007), the professional identity of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers has received little attention (e.g. Author, 2013).

From a contemporary perspective, professional identity is deemed multiple, discontinuous and social in nature, immersed in various social worlds where interdependence and discourse cause shifts across time and contexts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Lemke (2008) argues that as a notion identity links the personal domain of lived, moment-by-moment experience with cultural and social systems of beliefs, values and meaning-making practices. The professional identity of a teacher, however, “integrates the intellectual, the emotional, and the physical aspects of a teacher's life with the subjectivities of ‘teacher’” (Alsup, 2006, p. 36), that is, the different positions a teacher can take up within a particular context. These positions are influenced by teachers' intricately connected personal and professional biographies, as well as their social contexts at work (Bukor, 2015; Flores & Day, 2006). For teachers to renegotiate their positions amid collective discourses and practices at work, thus crafting their professional identity, they exercise agency in developing and learning (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Wells, 2007). In this paper, we refer to the form of agency used for identity negotiation as *identity agency* (Author et al., 2015; Author, 2016), using it as a lens to better understand teachers' professional identity. The aim of this study is to investigate how CLIL teachers in Finnish primary education craft their professional identity. We first examine *identity agency* as exercised at the level of classroom and collegial relationships, i.e. the ways in which pedagogical and relational identities are negotiated. Second, we examine how CLIL teachers' negotiation between the pedagogical and relational sides gives rise to a broader sense of professional identity.

2. Background on CLIL teaching

Teacher identity denotes a departing point for decision-making and actions that affect the work environment, which in turn affects the teacher. Very often, a struggle between personal and contextual components yields opportunities for negotiating one's professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Within the Finnish educational context, however, teachers have a high level of autonomy, trusted as professionals with no inspection or accountability regimes. This system purportedly promotes professional commitment and innovation, public engagement and inspiration, responsibility and sustainability (Sahlberg, 2011). It might, therefore, be anticipated that when teachers in Finland choose to take on the challenge of teaching subjects through a foreign language, they can more easily, more positively, respond to this challenge and the professional context might give rise to the potential of synergistic and transactional spaces for developing teacher identity. As a methodology, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) recognizes the dual aims of language and subject learning by using a foreign language (FL) to mediate the teaching and learning of curricular subjects. This approach became popular in Finland in the early 1990s, providing teachers with a more flexible and dynamic methodology (Coyle, 2007) for exercising autonomy and directing teaching efforts without being explicitly tethered to strict guidelines. Although Finnish educational authorities have not supported CLIL with top-down policy efforts as in other EU countries (Dalton-Puffer & Nikula, 2014), Finnish teachers' grassroots innovations have continued over the last two decades despite struggles along the way (Author, 2011a; Lehti, Järvinen, & Suomela-Salmi, 2006). The latest curriculum reform explicitly recognizes the importance of language innovation and integration in education and maintains that ‘every teacher is a language teacher’ (FNBE, 2014) creating a CLIL-friendly environment.

Previous research on Finnish CLIL teachers has focused on the fundamental role of language for teachers' individual and collective integrity (Author, 2011b, 2014), teacher beliefs (Bovellan, 2014) and different forms of agency CLIL teachers draw on (Author et al., 2017). International research suggests that the challenges CLIL teachers face can open new paths to teacher action (Nikula, Dalton-Puffer, & Llinares, 2013), despite the lack of explicated theoretical and pedagogical understanding (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Nikula, Dafouz, Moore, & Smit, 2016). In order to better understand how in-service CLIL teachers exercise professional agency in forming their identities, this study investigates the negotiation of teachers' identity on pedagogical and relational levels within the context of CLIL in Finnish elementary education. The following section elaborates on the theoretical framework for this study.

3. Identity negotiation

The concept of professional identity has received a significant amount of interest and generated much debate around the meaning of the term (for a review of studies on teacher's professional identity, see Beijaard et al., 2004). Gee (2000) offers a basic definition of identity as context-bound, yet premised upon an individually held interpretive system, life-trajectories, active construction and negotiation. Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006, p. 613) elaborate that “identities are a shifting amalgam of personal biography, culture, social influence and institutional values which may change according to role and circumstance”; that is, identities are multifaceted and liable to change according to external influences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). These definitions are reiterated in Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) comprehensive mapping of identity that highlights the recurrent multiplicity and unity, discontinuity and continuity, and social and individual nature of identity.

Teachers' professional identity is always negotiated in the individual and social space that is shared between the teachers' personal and professional lives. According to Day et al. (2006), Nias (1989) identified personal and professional elements as distinct in teachers' lives and identities, arguing the crucial role of the former in understanding teachers within their working lives. It is not only through influences of external policy, and social or structural conditions that teachers define their professional identity (Lasky, 2005), but also “through their beliefs and values about the kind of teacher they hope to be in the inevitably changing political, social, institutional and personal circumstances” (Day et al., 2006, p. 610). Thus, teacher identities are contextualized and draw on material and immaterial affordances to be negotiated at classroom, collegial and professional level.

In this study, teacher identity is conceptualized as the dynamic shifting process of an ongoing conception of oneself (Vähäsantanen, 2015), comprising biographical and professional trajectories as well as interpersonal, physical and material resources. In other words, teachers might be aware of past and present experiences and roles, yet negotiate their sense of being as professionals according to the circumstances they find themselves in. This process is guided by the organizing principles that teachers use in making sense of themselves and contexts alike as well as (re) interpreting their values, beliefs and experiences to achieve (trans) formation in answer to personal, social and cognitive influences (Flores & Day, 2006). The outcomes of this process are manifested through the multiple aspects of teachers' being, acting, and understanding (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In effect, teacher identity is both an intrinsically psychological phenomenon and a deeply social, real-world phenomenon; the self- and other-image of teachers are negotiated within discursive and institutional settings, affecting their communities and working conditions (Varghese

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